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FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3035

INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 5354

RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING PRIORITY 3082

RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2947

RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY

RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3598

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 000794

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, INL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV KCRM SOCI TX

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: MILITARY CADETS ARRESTED
FOR MAKING FAKE BUS PASSES

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (U) SUMMARY: Two senior cadets of the Military Institute were arrested on June 14 for making and distributing counterfeit bus passes. The Deputy Defense Minister promised to prosecute all those who were involved. The cadets, dismissed from the institute, could be jailed for up to two years. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (SBU) As was learned by an Embassy Locally Employed Staff (LES) member, whose sister works at the Military Hospital, on Sunday, June 14 at 4:00 a.m., officers of the Internal Counter-Intelligence Unit (ICIU) of the Ministry of Defense arrived at the barracks of the Military Institute, handcuffed two senior cadets, and escorted them out. The cadets, who would have graduated and become lieutenants in a week, were prosecuted for making and distributing counterfeit monthly bus passes. Reportedly, the cadets were carrying out their illegal activities within the Military Institute's premises, using the Institute's equipment (computers, scanners, printers), which was the reason that the ICIU was involved in the arrests.

¶4. (U) The official monthly bus pass is five centimeter by five centimeter paper card, with no security features (like watermarks or holographic labels), printed on regular paper. It allows unlimited travel on public buses and trolley buses during one calendar month. Every month it is issued using a different color. Passengers simply show their monthly passes to the bus driver when exiting the bus. There is no system of registering or scanning the passes. Furthermore, since the passes change color each month, the bus drivers never check the individual pass closely to verify its validity, only glancing at its color. The public can obtain monthly bus passes at any bus stop kiosk or from bus/trolleybus

drivers. The fixed price for the monthly bus pass is 8 manats (\$2.80). Reportedly, the cadets were selling their fake passes for 5 manats. The passes were sold to fellow cadets as well as to the people outside the Institute. The LES was told by her neighbor that she used to regularly obtain a monthly bus pass for 6 manats from her "acquaintances." Apparently some people acted as brokers for the counterfeit passes, buying multiple bus passes from the cadets and re-selling them for a modest profit, while still undercutting the official price.

¶ 15. (U) According to a Senior Lieutenant in the military, a graduate of the same Military Institute where the scandal took place, Deputy Minister of Defense, General Major Muhammedguly Atabayev held a meeting in the afternoon of the same day the cadets were arrested and spoke about the incident. Addressing the cadets and teachers of the Institute, Atabayev said, "I don't know their [the arrested cadets] future, but the investigation is under way and if any of others of you were also involved, be sure that we will get you." Reportedly, the order to dismiss the arrested cadets from the Institute was issued on the same Sunday. (NOTE: Sunday is a non-working day in Turkmenistan.)

¶ 16. (SBU) COMMENT: According to the Criminal Code, the forgery, production and sale of official documents, stamps, and seals is punishable by correctional labor for up to two years or imprisonment for a term not exceeding two years.

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The case will be passed to the Prosecutor General's Office as the ICIU does not prosecute cases, but as the interviewed Senior Lieutenant said "Military officers are always convicted with the maximum punishment. Most likely some other charges will be added to them as well." The Lieutenant added that in addition to the counterfeiting offense, charges related to "things that they have not done" will likely be pressed in order to justify a more severe sentence. He noted that "that's how it usually happens here." END COMMENT.

MILES